

Notes from Research Review Team presentation at the Science Advisory Board Meeting
November 4, 2003

Science Advisory Board Members

Dr. Leonard Pietrafesa, Interim Chair
Dr. Vera Alexander
Mr. David Blaskovich
Dr. Otis Brown
Mr. Peter Douglas
Dr. Susan Hanna
Dr. Arthur Maxwell
Dr. Jake Rice
Dr. John Snow
Dr. Denise Stephenson-Hawk

Review Team Members (present or on phone)

Dr. Berrien Moore
Dr. Richard Rosen
Dr. Richard Spinrad
RADM Richard West

Jack Kelly, Deputy Under Secretary of NOAA, opened the discussion by talking about the background of this review: FY 2003 budget cuts in OAR, FY 04 congressional language on reports required, and outside concerns on the management, organization and relevancy of OAR. He discussed that the Science Advisory Board chartered the review team and the draft report would be discussed at the January 6 meeting.

Berrien began his presentation (attached) with similar information on the background as well as the charge to the review team.

The following captures some of the highlights of the discussion during the presentation and questions asked.

Are October 22/23 presentations available to SAB members? Note—SAB members will be receiving the URL for review team website and we will add presentations by Louisa Koch and NWS, NESDIS, NOS and NMFS which are not yet on the website.

The Review team will be in town on either November 24 or 25 and December 4,5. Priority will be to talk to Dr. Mahoney and to Congressional staff. Need to meet with the Hill staff to be sure team is doing what they want. Per email to Berrien, staff said they would meet but only after conference is completed on the FY 2004 appropriation, which may happen in time for the December 4-5 timeframe. Per Berrien, may also meet with authorizing staff after the meeting with appropriations staff.

Spinrad—There should be a recognition and formal confirmation of research taxonomy. There are different types of research and that's okay (like DOD). Need to formalize the transition process and give some entity responsibility.

West—Look at all research in NOAA but there must be a recognition that this can't be done by December 15.

Douglas—Lots of distrust in the labs, this is an opportunity to establish trust. It is an issue of credibility in the labs versus business as usual—need to recognize NOAA as an honest broker.

SAB needs time to review report. They will have a draft mid-December and time to review it before the January 6 meeting.

Moore—There is an expectation about efficiency not connected to reality. If metric is dollars, it may not be there. If looking at progress, there can be a difference. We will try to make the quality better. There are services and products coming from research.

VADM Lautenbacher—What is a product or service? Mary Glackin is bringing this to closure. There are certain expectations of the public. This needs to be sorted out.

Pietrafesa—Will the team get a definition of operations?

Spinrad—Need to clarify that provision of services and products are not operations.

Stephenson-Hawk—Are you going to prioritize projects and if so, cut those at the bottom?

Moore—Will call for a research plan that will have a prioritization. The team won't do it themselves.

Maxwell—Asked about 50% rule and how does that fit in

Moore—Looking at Joint Institutes, Sea Grant and seeing what it means. Also looking to see if there are other general principles, e.g., what percent should go to long-term research? Team may ask NIH, industrial groups.

Stephenson-Hawk. Define basic and applied research in NOAA. She thinks that all of it should be applied, and if not, should be cut.

Spinrad—only NOAA leadership can define and protect basic research geared toward “NOAA after next”—this decision should not be made in labs.

VADM Lautenbacher—We don't have the trust of the appropriations staff. NOAA has not been able to answer basic questions. This results in earmarks. Research Council was set up to wrestle with these questions. Dave Evans left and there was no leadership for

the Council. It was charged to set up a research strategic plan, research budget, and definition of the 50% to answer community support issue. We need to increase trust. People who work in labs are excellent, world-renowned. Great individual track record. He wants them to get support of the community. Earth sciences are extremely important to the future of the country. NOAA is a unique organization and we have a great opportunity to bring value from earth sciences. We need to build community support and need coherence in what we do. We need to get science community together to support our research.

He has not had enough time to work on these questions.

Maxwell—Sea Grant represents a lot of the academic community and has a good link to Congress. You should use them.

Moore—Had an excellent discussion with Ron Baird. Sea Grant is being run well but needs to connect better to NOAA. Sea Grant could be a conduit for NMFS and NOS.

Stephenson-Hawk—What percent of OAR money goes outside?

Louisa Koch answered it depend on definitions—if we consider the Joint Institutes internal, then it is about 40%; if joint institutes are considered external, then it is about 50%

(Will get latest information using FY 03 actuals and post on website)

Moore—Joint Institutes are very useful in carrying out research if done in a focused direction. JI programs must be aligned to mission.

Alexander—How much do labs get from external sources?

Moore—We have that information and the reviews are mixed. In some cases the lab director says they are leveraging money for NOAA purposes. Others can say they are not responsive to NOAA since they are being paid by other agencies. It ranges from 0 in some labs to more than 50% in a few labs.

Rice—You should get the review completed of the Beaufort, S.C. lab, they get close to 50% external funding.

What are the issues in the Hill language? Is it research that we shouldn't be doing (not in the NOAA Mission? Are we being inefficient or redundant? Or do we have the balance wrong?

Moore—think it's the latter two. Thinks there is concern about the balance, e.g., near term, midterm, and long term; or that some things are done by others.

Snow—NOAA is a partner and should have some external work (e.g. aviation, where NOAA does not have the lead) but shouldn't be a job shop. There is always a desire for simplicity but NOAA is not a simple agency and research won't be simple.

Brown—Status quo took years to evolve. Labs tried to have certain pools of expertise. How do you determine what expertise NOAA needs? What is needed to fund them?

Douglas—There are some positives about capacity and expertise. Should be encouraged but make sure NOAA is getting its money's worth. Should look at capacity in terms of plan or agenda.

Moore—Some research to operations issues involves reticence to take action because you lose budget in the transition process. Needs to be some evolution.

Spinrad—Research structure not just a NOAA issue. No mechanism for leadership of NOAA to review lab structure and research plan.

VADM Lautenbacher—We do not endorse reimbursables. Should be eliminated if they do not support the NOAA mission. Labs should not be overly dependent on outside funding.

Transition activities –we will set aside funding for research. Wants to protect a certain amount of money for research.

Stephenson-Hawk—Nothing done with the reviews done by SAB.

Moore—would like to get copies of reviews from SAB as well as the eight principles of research they developed.

Board made a motion that was seconded and approved to accept the terms of reference for the review team.